

## **Citizens' Unity Commission Unity Awards Ceremony**

### **2013 Recipients**

#### **Honorable Mention Awardees**

- a. Nominated by Lori Thomas. **Tammy Thomas Hopson** is the Founder/CEO of Image Design Consulting Company and she has used her gifts to create the **B.L.I.S.S Program for Life** where she offers interactive activities for children and adults in civility and kindness.

She is working on designing a city-wide response with tips and resources to celebrate "Civility Awareness Month" where young and old can challenge themselves to do random acts of kindness and courtesy.

B.L.I.S.S. – Better Living In Seven Steps: Know yourself; love yourself; enjoy yourself; stretch yourself; share yourself; applaud yourself; and present yourself...Lessons for all of us.

- b. Nominated by Kurt Taylor. **The Old Wythe Neighborhood Association** has demonstrated a commitment to create a highly inclusive environment where all people regardless of color or culture feel welcomed.

Olde Wythe is one of the most racially, religiously and economically diverse neighborhoods in Hampton. The emphasis on diversity and inclusion works well for the greater good of the neighborhood. It creates harmony, a high sense of safety and the active participation of neighbors in cultural, civic and community service activities.

OWNA is not a homeowner association, but a volunteer organization focused on the quality of life of all its neighbors around the wide spectrum of diversity including language, education level, country origin, religion and economic situation.

- c. Nominated by Lori Thomas. As President of **Sister Cities of Hampton, Virginia, Dianne F. Peterson** has led the charge of broadening the perspectives of Hampton citizens, especially young people, as to the value of international understanding and personal interaction with people from diverse cultures.

The vision of Sister Cities is to promote friendship between citizens/students/businesses through exchanges and personal interactions. Hampton Sister Cities are in Vendome, France and Anyang, South Korea.

In a partnership with Hampton City Schools, young people have experienced foreign travel and international competitions. For example, two Hampton students, Joshua Williams from Hampton High School who won the grand prize through the International Young Artist Showcase in 2012 and Angelica Kirk of Bethel High School who was a winner in 2013 have greatly benefitted from the work of Sisters Cities.

- d. Nominated by Commissioner Kayla A. Hicks, **Margaret Wilson and Claude Vann III** continue to keep the pilot light of the **Aberdeen Garden Historic Museum** producing a steady flow of knowledge about the Black residents of Hampton in 1935 who lived and gardened in the Homestead Project that was both architecturally designed and built by Black professionals and laborers.

Their dedication goes beyond museum business hours. They work diligently to tell the stories of the diversity among the Black people who did not all see themselves as solely African Americans, but they embraced the varied differences of their ancestry and cultural backgrounds such as Haitian, Creole, French, Spanish, Jamaican, Portuguese, West Indian, Irish, etc. The stories remain current because of their efforts.

## Unity Awards

- a. Nominated by Commissioner Ruthann Kellum. **Kathryn “Kasia” Grzelkowski** has been a tireless advocate for Hampton citizens with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

As the President/CEO of **the Arc of the Virginia Peninsula**, Kasia has been an extraordinary champion for educating the public on the life experiences and capabilities of citizens who are clients of “Arc.”

She hosts breakfast presentations to invited members of the community that include experiential tours of the regional nonprofit organization. She encourages the public to experience interactions that highlight the strengths our more challenged citizens have in ways that dispel myths and misperceptions about them.

Because of Kasia’s efforts, the Hampton community is more tolerant in their judgment and more open to sharing their neighborhoods with groups of citizens who want the opportunity to work and to live safely across the city.

- b. Nominated by Councilmen George Wallace and Will Moffett. **BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, the Hindu Worship Center**, has been a particularly open and welcoming to City elected leaders and citizens at large.

The leadership of the Hindu religious community has extended numerous invitations to guests across the city of Hampton to attend services and special events. The Hindu congregation has gone out of its way to dispel myths and

misperceptions about their faith practices and extend its welcome to Hampton citizens of various religious faiths to learn about the Hindu religion and to experience the traditions, food and culture of our neighbors of various Asian backgrounds.

The leadership of the temple has demonstrated successfully a commitment to foster healthy cross-cultural relationship building.

- c. Nominated by Commissioner Kayla A. Hicks. Described as a man who takes the awareness of diversity from “barriers to bridges,” **Harold DeHaven** lives a life of interacting with people from all backgrounds on a personal day-to-day level. For many years, “De” represented the mission of the Citizens’ Unity Commission to the Hampton public.

He is a committed advocate for opening wide the doors of multicultural dialogue and cross-cultural conflict resolution. He stands proud with the homeless, marginalized and challenged communities in our city offering comfort, support and resources. As an individual, he has touched the lives of many Hampton citizens who believed they were alone.

With an open spirit and gentle smile, he has uplifted and inspired many. His tools of choice are compassion and respect.

- d. Nominated by Commissioner Mary Wallace. **Joan Harper-Neely** is a National Board Certified Teacher at W.M. Cooper Elementary Magnet School for Technology and the Coordinator of the **A Star Achievers Academy YMCA Program**.

The Academy offers a hands-on engineering, science, art and physical activities summer camp. Volunteers are needed to assist students and every year; a diverse group of teens and preteens from Hampton City’s middle and high schools donate their time to help students who have a variety of needs. The students come from different economic, social and cultural backgrounds that are different from the teens.

They learn that there are people in their community who care about them regardless of their skin color or living conditions at home. With positive attitudes and a willingness to give of themselves, the teen volunteers demonstrate the value of reaching beyond one’s comfort level and connecting at the heart.

- e. Nominated by Commissioner Robert Lewis, Sr. **Sandra Triolet-Berglund** as Sales and Events Manager of the Hampton **Cinèbristro** has established a partnership that provides a comfortable venue for intentional cross-cultural interaction.

The events bring groups of people of diverse backgrounds and life experiences together to enjoy a film and to explore their varied views, opinions and

experiences. Because of her ingenuity and commitment to an inclusive community, approximately 400 citizens of Hampton have explored the issues of race and culture in an interactive program call Movie & Mic Night.

There are plans to explore many of the other dimensions of diversity using film and dialogue such as gender, physical and mental ability, sexual orientation and the immigrant experiences.

### **Citizens' Unity Commission Outstanding Citizens of the Year**

- a. Nomination by Ms. Chadra Pittman Walke. **Calvin Pearson** is the Founder and President of **Project 1619**, Inc. which is a non-profit organization whose goals are to promote Hampton's rich African American history and the factual story about the arrival of the first Africans in English, North America.

Almost 21 years ago he started a crusade to dispel the myth that the first enslaved Africans were off-loaded at Jamestown. Due to Mr. Pearson's dogged tenacity and determination, it is now documented historically that the first Africans were in fact brought ashore at Point Comfort, which is now Fort Monroe. He submitted a proposed resolution to the Virginia General Assembly through Delegate Jeoin Ward to recognize his findings. The resolution was approved.

Through Mr. Pearson's efforts, the country now recognizes one of the most significant events in American history. Those first Africans were captured and brought from Angola, Africa. The Angola Government asked Mr. Pearson to help them produce a documentary so that the people of Angola would know about their ancestors being the first Africans in America. Because of his efforts, Mr. Pearson has corrected a long misunderstood historical fact.

He believes that Hampton's strengths lie in the diversity of its people. "By understanding each other's cultures, we can peacefully co-exist." As the Hampton's 400 Anniversary Statue Chairman, his top priority was to illustrate the role of cultural diversity in Hampton by depicting a Native American, an English settler and an African as the founding cultures of Hampton. The statue is located at Carousel Park.

- b. Nominated by Michael Mannen. Throughout his 13-year tenure at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, **Monsignor Robert M. Perkins**, now retired, insisted, through word, deed and action that members of his church community consistently bring the Gospel message(s) to life. His regular challenge to his congregation was "to take care of each other no matter what racial, cultural or gender divisions exist." He wanted his members to live out the mission to "feed the poor", "embrace your fellow man" and "break down any of the "ISMS" that divide us."

To this end, Msgr. Bob had a vision to develop a forum of open and honest, and sometimes painful, dialogue that ultimately led to the creation of the historic "**Circles of Diversity**." He insisted that if we are "to embrace each other, we have

to heal any wounds, or perceptions, that divide us." Indeed the recent dialogues have built bridges of trust, mutual understanding and respect among the members of First Baptist Church of Hampton and the ICCC congregation. Because of his vision, that he was willing to execute, he and Reverend Dr. Richard Wills demonstrated the courage that has now started a movement within the faith community.

He cautioned, "We will never understand each other if we aren't engaged in meaningful dialogue with each other." His mantra of total inclusion and forced dialogue has allowed his small community of believers to readily and easily embrace each other no matter who they are, or from where they may come. The members of ICCC come from almost every corner of the world globe. Msgr. Bob will be the first to say that there is "much work to do" in the diversity arena, but he has certainly spring-boarded a community and called us to action!

- c. Nominated by Mrs. Beverly P. Williams. **Reverend Dr. Richard Wills** is the Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Hampton. Under his leadership the church has fostered healthy racial and cultural relationships by engaging in a partnership ministry with Immaculate Conception Catholic Church. The unique outreach ministry is identified by the City of Hampton through the work of the Citizens' Unity Commission. The **Circles of Diversity** consists of active members from both congregations coming together weekly to have conversations about sensitive issues that challenge citizens of diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.

Pastor Wills teaches his church members by example. It is because of his vision for SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND LOVING COMMUNITY FOCUSSED MINISTRIES, his leadership has created a historic relationship between Catholics and Baptists in the Hampton community. Pastor Wills lives and encourages others to live a loving and inclusive approach to valuing diversity.

- d. Nominated by Commissioner Kayla A. Hicks. **Ellen Shackelford** has worked tirelessly to educate citizens of Hampton on the experiences of people living with disabilities. Serving as a liaison of the Citizens' Unity Commission and on the City of Hampton's Mayors Board for **People with Disabilities**, she works diligently to dispel myths and foster open dialogue about the community of citizens with disabilities.

She facilitates classes in both the Institute of Diversity and Inclusion at Thomas Nelson Community College, the Hampton Diversity College and many other conferences, group gatherings and faith group meetings. Ellen has taken the challenges of her own personal experience and turned them into a commitment to educate and to raise awareness. She created Buggy Buddies which is a program to assist people with disabilities while shopping and she has been an advocate for Assistance at Hampton Gas Pumps.

She formed her own company, Connections Access Consulting Services by Ellen that includes: Disability etiquette, Sensitivity training, People First Language, The 10 Commandments of Communicating with People with Disabilities, and the Kids on The Block Puppet Education curriculum. Ellen is a champion who teaches us all how to look accurately through the many lenses of disabilities. Thank you Ellen!